

Fishing, Fossil and Artifact Collecting Report

Daniel A. Woehr and Son and Friends
September, 2009

September 5, 2009: Slim Pickings

The drought was in full force and John Jackson and I were scraping rock bottom looking for productive places to collect. We walked a creek with a history of Pleistocene and artifact finds that John had permission to visit and finds were sparse. We each found a fossil horse tooth and some flint flakes while John picked up a big hunk of mammoth limb bone and I took a plate of mammoth tooth enamel. Circling back to his friend Brenda's house we got to see some of the things she's found after floods in the past, most notably a couple mammoth teeth, one a full upper weighing 8-10 pounds.....I'll keep dreaming for now.

A quick stop in transit produced a handful of Eocene shark, ray, and reptile teeth for each of us, but no major finds. Compared to our normal steady diet of fossils, this was truly a famine.



FIG 1: Pleistocene horse lower molar left, mammoth tooth fragment right (Site 522)



FIG 2: Eocene shark, ray, and reptile teeth

September 6, 2009: Preempted at Artifact Alley

John and I did an 11 mile canoe trip on a stream course that in the past had given up quite a pile of artifacts including Archaic projectile points, flint knives, scrapers, even a metate or grinding stone. This trip however was quite different as our worthy competition had done a thorough job of beating us to the punch. I spied a bone poking out of a bank high above the water, climbed up to investigate, and noticed that somebody had begun to dig out a bison femur and given up. I spent an hour digging out the associated bison mandible and we proceeded on downstream.



FIG 3: Holocene bison mandible taken from an Indian campsite (Site 473)

Bar after bar showed signs of disturbance and lacked substantial artifact finds. Low water however did allow me to

pluck a big flint chopper from a submerged gravel bar while John made a cool find of his own... "Wouldn't it be funny if there were mosasaur verts here?", he wondered aloud as he eyed a curious form underwater. Hoisting it aloft, it turned out to be a mosasaur vert, a very large one in fact with crisp detail suggesting that we had encountered it very close to where it had eroded out of the Ozan formation (78 MYA).



FIGS 4-7: The author's flint chopper followed by John Jackson's big mosasaur vertebra (Site 475)





This was our last good find of the day, so it was a tough paddle...in fact I kicked back and napped on several bars in between paddling runs. Perhaps next time, I told myself, a trip better timed to optimum collecting conditions would boost my confidence and effort level...

September 13, 2009: Preempted Again?!?!

Big rains had fallen close to home for the first time in a while, and Weston and I chose to do kid stuff all day Saturday – rides at Kiddie Park, Dave and Busters for video games, Mexican ice cream, etc.

On Sunday at the Corsicana site (68 MYA) we found few fossils but lots of foot prints of all sizes. The site had been visited by a group. A couple hours of looking still netted us a few echinoids and other goodies. The competitive strike didn't skewer my heart though as I've been fortunate enough to have the site more or less to myself for the last 4 years, a timeframe including some ludicrously productive stretches providing me with several species new to science.

Now the area has largely been graded and productive stretch is a mere sliver of its former size. It was fun while it lasted, but diminishing returns will be the rule until the place is no longer collectible.



FIGS 8-9: Corsicana fm crab claw *Dakoticancer australis* above, echinoids *Hemiaster bexari* and one broken *Plesisaster americanus* below (Site 349)



FIGS 10-11: Corsicana fm gastropods above, more gastropods, bivalves including *Neithea bexarensis*, and two rough *Eutrephoceras* nautiloids below (Site 349)

September 19, 2009: A Change of Pace

Believe it or not, I'm not all about fossils and artifacts. I'm all about the outdoors, and varied pursuits often call my name. Fishing at the coast was in order this particular Saturday. Although I overslept my alarm by 5 hours, 4 tides that day and new moon suggested that fish would be on the feed on and off all day, so I jumped in the car and headed down around lunch time.

Motoring my kayak out to a work dock I threw live shrimp up to the base of the wall and allowed them to sink into deep water at the base of the wall. The bite was on with the first cast, and over the course of 2-3 hours I landed 6 keeper mangrove snapper and released several undersized redfish. No big pulls this day, but had I not overslept...

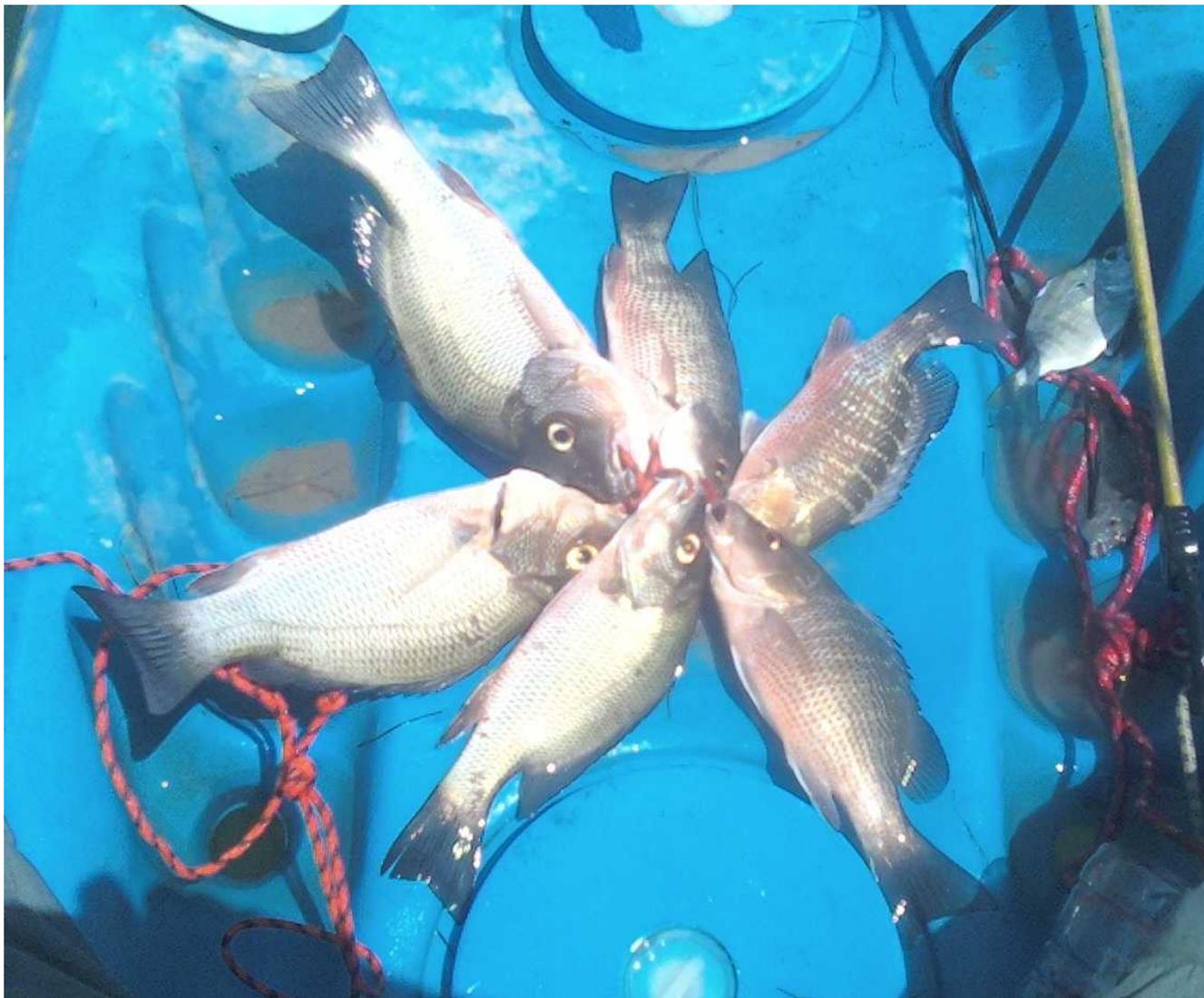


FIG 12: The author's stringer of mangrove snapper taken on live shrimp from Corpus Christi Bay

September 20, 2009: Rematch with Artifact Alley

Big rains across the state had flash flooded many watersheds, Artifact Alley being one of those areas. So with a heightened sense of competition John and I reacted like minutemen and slid his Kevlar racing canoe into the water. At the first bar John took the water and I took the dry gravel. It turns out that the narrow strip at the water's edge had been overlooked by both of us on the first pass as neither wanted to be looking in the other guy's area. Good thing John has learned to look where I have been....a perfect 2 inch Ensor point made its way into his collection.

The next major collecting area was composed of a bank exposing a campsite high in the wall studded with fire rock, flint chips, even bone fragments. A catch basin at the bottom was loaded with more burned rock and flint concentrated in a small area. I took this bank and catch basin while John took the bar across the stream. John soon called out that he had found the base of a point, then seconds later a perfect spear point in 3 inches of water, then a very nice 4 inch Friday blade 6 feet away.



FIGS 13-20: The author scrutinizing a campsite eroding out of the high bank followed by his own finds there this and next 6 pages, John Jackson's impressive finds to follow (Site 524)













I had been picking up flint scrapers and other low grade artifacts but maintained confidence in what I was seeing. Soon I landed a woodworking tool, then another scraper, then the top 2/3 of a nice knife blade. I spied a nice 2 inch point on the ground, its tip impact fractured, but still a piece suitable for framing. No more than 2 feet away I spied my best find of the day, a 3+ inch Montell point with a needle tip and delicate base notching intact in gray flint. Perhaps my spell of bad luck was broken.

Later we happened upon the bank where I had once taken a metate. Climbing high on the wall and hanging on by roots, I took some bison bones and later a flint knife blade with very sharp edges, all to be displayed as associated with the metate.



FIGS 21-22: The author's Archaic knife protruding from a cut bank with a campsite eroding out of the wall as noted by associated burned midden rock, snails, and freshwater clams this page, associated bison bones next page (Site 474)





FIGS 23-25: The author's bison tooth, flint tools, and broken blades found at Sites 474 and 475 this and next 2 pages





Downstream John found a nice 3 inch black Friday blade while I napped on the same bar. Later his sharp eyes performed for him again. We had walked a bar side by side on the first pass, my eyes concentrating center and right as I walked so as not to take on too much ground to scan at once efficiently. On our second pass John spotted a 4 ½ inch Friday blade leaning up against a rock...a stellar piece...and I had walked within 3 feet of it looking the other way!!! Rather one of us than neither of us I reasoned, content with my earlier finds.

A subsequent bar didn't give up nice points, but John picked up a flint chopper on one side of the stream while I grabbed a worn out 2 1/2 inch diameter vertebra from the Cretaceous fish *Xiphactinus audax*. This was my first X fish vert and it hailed from the Ozan formation.

Another bar near the end of our journey had abundant gravel on both sides of the stream. John took one side while I took the other. Soon he called out that he had found a nice point covered in caliche. It had hidden very well and only experienced eyes would have recognized it amongst the random disorder of mud and gravel. In fading light I spotted the edge of a triangular black form.....a needle point projectile was reduced to possession, its base missing a portion but still a point worth displaying.



FIGS 26-28: The author's first fish vertebra *Xiphactinus audax* abeit worn from the Ozan fm followed by two views of his last point for the day (Sites 475-476)







FIGS 29-31: John Jackson's best finds of the day followed by the soft shelled turtle *Apalone ferox* caught and released by the author this and next 2 pages





Spirited paddling got us to the vehicle before night fell, and we lauded the day as one of our best ever, with about 25 keeper artifacts coming to hand between us, probably 7 or 8 being museum grade. Special thanks to John for use of his hard earned, ludicrously productive site. We had indeed done a thorough job of disarming the local (deceased) Native American populace and wouldn't mind a repeat at some point in the future.

September 21, 2009: Solo Giggling the Pleistocene

Fish, check. Artifacts, check. It only seemed appropriate to take Monday off to look for fossils. Getting my kayak into the stream was a painful ordeal, but once done I motored toward some exposures that had given up the goods in the past. Some bars were underwater and therefore unhuntable in water the flowing chocolate milk. I motored on to a bank and gave it a gander....no major finds this time, but I did get a tapir phalanx (foot bone), piece of gator skull, turtle bones and shell fragments among other things.



FIGS 32-35: Pleistocene finds from left to right tapir phalanx *Tapirus* c.f. *veroensis*, alligator skull plate *Alligator mississippiensis*, turtle plastron section, unidentified rib (Site 157) followed by 3 close up views of tapir phalanx









FIGS 36-37: Deer metapodial *Odocoileus virginianus* (Site 132)

Getting out of the stream and back up the bank was pure hell working uphill in knee high chocolate pudding. I sweated like a pig and laughed at my predicament. Good thing I drank a couple of those foofy coffee energy drinks that morning.

My next put-in was much easier, the fastest in history for that matter. The boat got away from me and hurdled downhill with me running full speed behind it. It was loaded with all my gear and would have shot out into the current with me making a running jump right behind hit had soft mud not slowed it at the water's edge.

The first gravel bar was a dud, mostly covered with sand. Once upon a time it had given me various horse and mammoth remains as well as a couple nice spear points. No such luck this time. Motoring on to my favorite bar in all of Texas I gave chase to Pleistocene goodies. Mere feet from where I beached the boat I made the find that made the whole day worth it.....1/2 of a mastodon tooth with beautiful enamel. A few more finds helped make it worthwhile – a camel medial phalanx (toe bone), a few horse teeth, a deer antler. Again the water was still high, perhaps hiding still more and better finds, but I'll be back for them.....



FIGS 38-41: Partial mastodon tooth *Mammot americanum* this and next 3 pages (Site 373)









FIGS 42-43: Unidentified camelid phalanx (foot bone) and deer antler *O. virginianus* along with two horse lower molars *Equus* sp. (Site 373)



FIGS 44-45: Unidentified distal ulna top left and scapula top right, turtle plastron fragments below (Site 373)



FIGS 46-47: Indian pottery fragments (Site 373)

September 26, 2009: Drenched River Rats Enjoy Another ManVenture

While shopping for a new pair of creek shoes for young Weston, he surprised me at the last minute....I had petitioned hard for him to go fossil collecting, and in the end he asked to make it a 2 day camping trip. So with the car chock-full-o-gear and the kayak on the roof we set out in the wee hours for a dawn assault on one of my favorite gravel bars in the state. With gear strapped down to the yak and the boy manning the bow I pulled the rip cord and with a throaty gargle the little Nissan chugged us miles to our private honey hole. One problem though.....the honey was sparse. A couple hours of methodical grid searching turned up only a few items of interest, most notably a Pleistocene horse medial phalanx (toe bone) and a camel astragalus (heel bone).



FIGS 48-51: Weston Woehr with his first Pleistocene *Bison* sp. tooth above followed by a camelid astragulus (ankle bone) and then a horse medial phalanx this and next 2 pages (Site 373)







FIGS 52-53: Various turtle shell fragments followed by one of the more charismatic pieces of petrified wood from Site 373

Speaking again of honey....somehow at one point I stirred a bee hive and had to drop the kayak and run out of range with Weston. It took them so long to settle down that I put on a life jacket to protect my torso a little better, shades to cover my eyes, then went in with a can of engine starting fluid and Frisbee to give them hell while

retrieving my kayak. One got me on the shoulder but otherwise the mission was a success. The Navy Seals would have been proud.

After yanking the boat we took a relaxing car ride to the next put in. After motoring to a nearby bar I noticed 2 things to our advantage: first of all there were no footprints (except for cows), so we weren't facing much competition, and secondly recent rains had winnowed the sand away, revealing the gravel and sandstone that held the goodies we were after.

I grabbed a few things like a nice horse upper molar and a worn vertebra, all building confidence in our efforts going forward. The next bar produced a double horn core from the Pleistocene antelope *Tetrameryx*, only the second I've taken in 5 years. I followed this up with a 2 or 3 inch section of mammoth enamel and a few turtle shell fragments.



FIG 54: Turtle shell fragment, horse upper molar, and horse astragalus (Site 380)



FIGS 55-60: Antelope *Tetrameryx* c.f. *schuleri* double horn core followed by mammoth *Mammuthus columbi* enamel fragment and Weston Woehr with his unidentified distal humerus this and next 4 pages (Site 381)









We stopped at another bar just before turning back to our put in. Thinking I was looking at one more piece of fossil turtle shell Weston and I began scratching around in the sand and gravel....the bone was bigger than I thought....."That's no turtle shell.....is that a jaw?", I wondered aloud.....indeed it was. Hoisting it aloft, I could see that I had unmistakably found my first tapir mandible *Tapirus veroensis*. It had one tooth intact in the jaw, the only thing making it fall short of absolute glory was the fact that half of the enamel crown was missing. But half of another tooth root was intact as well, making this rare piece all the more interesting. I look forward to finding an upgrade to this wonderful and rare specimen.



FIGS 61-64: Tapir mandible *Tapirus veroensis* this and next page (Site 382)





FIG 65: Turtle shell fragment and horse lower molar (Site 382)

I had banged the lower unit on logs and gravel several times, and at dusk as we returned to our put in the shear pin finally gave and I had to paddle the last half mile upstream against the current, all the while Weston letting me know that I was slow and he was starving. Back at the car I pulled out the propane burner and a skillet and whipped up some brisket in record time. We sat around throwing back sizzling meat and for "dessert" Weston decided to stir fry some Slim Jims with Cheetos in brisket grease..."just like Mom used to make".....then he spent an hour or so throwing moths and beetles into the flames....boys will be boys. We were comfortable enough in the car to sleep 8 or 9 hours greasy from bug spray but otherwise refreshed.

September 27, 2009: A Little More Adventure for the Boy

Around 8 a.m. I finally got my lazy carcass out of the passenger seat and whipped up some scrambled eggs and brisket. We made one last boat run and found one of my favorite collecting banks to be completely covered with vegetation. However, a nearby gravel bar gave up a few goodies, and this was Weston's day to shine.

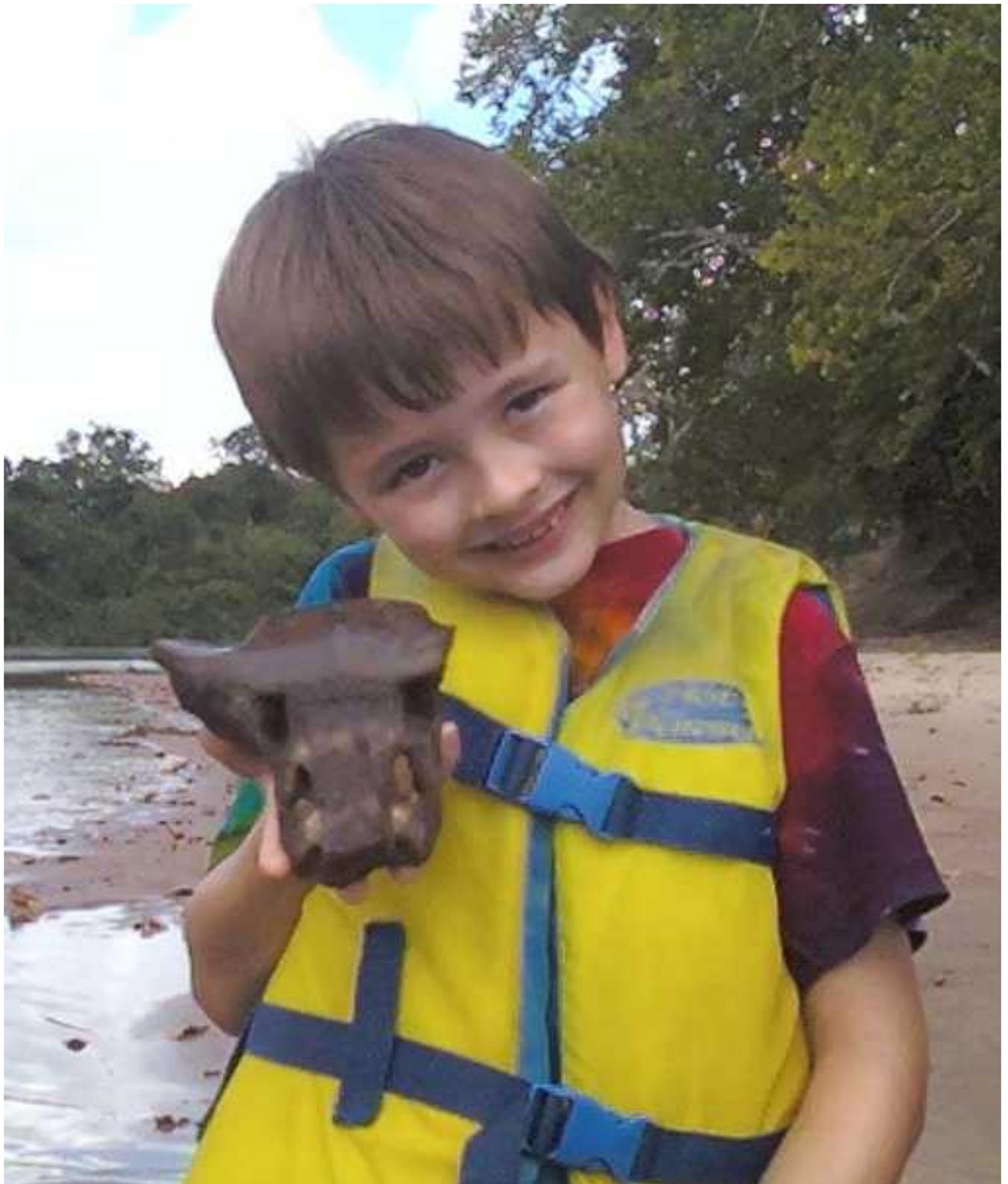
Much to his liking, there must have been an old dump upstream so the bar was littered with 50-80 year old bottles. He ran around grabbing old Purex and Clorox bottles in addition to a Prohibition Era 1/2 pint whiskey bottle (shouldn't every 7 year old have a few?). He also found some sort of caudal vertebra to round out his suite of finds. As we sat on the bar killing time I heard the words I loved to hear..."Hey Dad this is really fun, and I learn

about stuff you don't learn in school, and I can learn and have fun at the same time".

At our final bar Weston jumped out in front of me, his competitive edge wanting to grab the best finds first (where does he get this?). He picked up a big horse or bison sacrum, quite an impressive find. I sat in the boat and he showed up later with a few more bottles and some bones and turtle shell fragments, saying "Look what I found when you were being lazy sitting in the boat!" I'm all for the boy being encouraged by the rewards of his hard effort. And at the end of the trip he said he'd put up with feeling dirty and wet a couple times a month to go out and find stuff with me. Now we're talkin'!



FIGS 65-67: Weston Woehr with some old bottles, an unidentified Pleistocene sacrum, and some turtle shell fragments, all his personal finds, this and next 2 pages (Site 414)





September 30, 2009: Diminishing Returns Still Worth the Effort

Since a couple more inches of rain had fallen the previous week at the Corsicana site I've been working for 4 years I opted to take a cursory look around after work on Wednesday. I had less than a couple hours of good light to work with so I didn't crawl the entire site but I did still find a few things worthy of note as the sun's final rays cast long shadows across the rocky fossilscape.

First a gleaming white crab claw caught my attention on the side of a freshly washed rut. Based on the position of the claw and the associated cheliped (clawed leg) segment it appeared that this particular *Dakoticancer australis* specimen was trying his hardest to dig himself out of his 68 million year old marly tomb. I guessed that much of it would be intact and dug wide accordingly. The specimen popped out all at once along with an explosion of marl chunks, each having leg sections in them.

There were 6 or 8 pieces in all but they were cleanly broken enough that I should be able to reconstruct it with both claws out in front in living position, and pereopods (walking legs) jutting out in all positions. This should be one of my better crabs from the site, but it was the only one that came to hand this trip. Side Note – That night while supergluing the pieces back together I noticed one claw missing.....I had accidentally left it on the exposure! I got up early the next morning before work and found it in the beam of my flashlight....(harbinger of things to come – stay tuned for more of this flashlight business in my October report)...



FIGS 68-71: A spectacular example of the Cretaceous crab *Dakoticancer australis* from the Corsicana fm this and next 2 pages (Site 349)







FIGS 72-73: Corsicana echinoids *Hemiaster bexari* above seated in an oyster *Pycnodonte mutabilis* followed more *H. bexari* below and one large *Plesiaster americanus* below (Site 349)

Aside from that I took a handful of *Hemiaster bexari* echinoids from rare juvenile specimens (6 mm) through adult (18 mm). But my best echinoid find was a decently preserved *Plesiaster americanus*. Not a bad way to spend a few hours after work, and I look forward to mopping up the rest of my local echinoid exposures this coming weekend.